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ABSTRACT

A teacher's experience of being a student in high school for a semester is recounted. The wide differences between teachers' and students' perceptions of responsibility for learning and teaching are pointed out as well as differences in attitude toward school and the world in general. Some suggestions are made for improving teaching and rapport with students. (JD)

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What Are **You** Doing Here?
or
Schooldays for the Teacher

by Ellen Glanz

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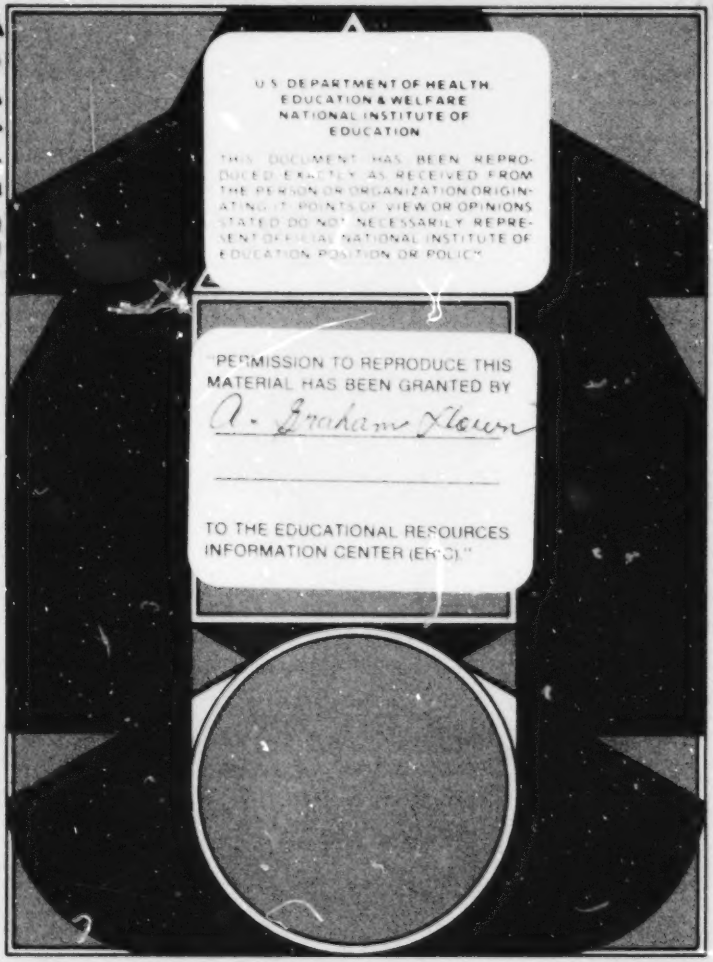

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Occasional Paper 26
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A FEW HIGHLIGHTS FROM THIS PAPER

Among my . . . schoolmates, the belief existed that the primary responsibility for their achievement rested with the teacher: it was his responsibility to teach well rather than their responsibility to learn carefully. (page 10.)

. . . the system encourages incredible passivity. In most classes one sits and listens. Some concentration is necessary, but no matter how interesting the teacher, after a number of hours of sitting and listening, boredom almost inevitably follows. . . . It is difficult for teachers to feel *how* passive the student's role is, for the role of teacher is the essence of activity. (page 13.)

Although we say we want to encourage responsibility, we really give little opportunity for students to make a real difference in the way a class goes. . . . There is little sense that anyone is depending on them. . . . If they come in unprepared . . . the class goes on anyway. (page 14.)

Nor . . . do enough parents take a share in stressing the value of education. Taking students to Colorado for two weeks, . . . out of school for dentist appointments or Christmas shopping, allowing them to work after school in spite of the fact that they are behind in their work—all reflect . . . attitudes that these activities are more important than schoolwork. Yet the same parents complain when their children do poorly. A commitment to help students learn must come from parents as well as teachers; it is too easy to blame the schools. (page 23.)

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FOREWORD

In T. H. White's *The Once and Future King*, Merlyn the magician is responsible for the education of the boy who will become King Arthur. As part of the future king's basic education Merlyn transforms his young student into different creatures—a fish, an ant, a goose—so that Arthur will gain the perspective of worlds different from but related to his own. For Arthur, the experience was more than role-playing. For a season, he *was* each of those creatures; and if his learning was never measured by achievement tests, his aptitude for the kingship was marvelously enhanced.

For a semester during the school year 1977-78, Ellen Glanz was transformed into a student at the high school where she had been a teacher for six years. *Time* (April 17, 1978) said she gave up her keys to the teachers' lounge. She did much more than that. For half the school year, Ellen Glanz *was* a student at Lincoln-Sudbury High School—going to classes, the cafeteria, the girls' room with other students; taking the same tests, doing the same homework, making the same kinds of excuses; belonging to a clique, even being kicked out of class.

The experiences confirmed her in the impression that the world of students is a separate world from that of teachers and adults; and while she recognizes that the separation is in some measure inevitable as well as necessary, she believes that today it is so great as to constitute a major obstacle to good teaching and sound learning. She also learned that for all our present-day enlightenment and intention to "humanize" education, an "overlay of compulsion" destroys initiative and responsibility among students. This, she explains, is a serious dilemma: on the one hand, the need for school-teacher-adult authority is clear; so, on the other hand, is the need for adolescent high school students to learn to think and act independently.

In this CBE occasional paper, Ellen Glanz speaks to these concerns as she recounts her experience as a student at Lincoln-Sudbury. She has no panacea to offer, but she does have suggestions to make. Better than much research, her ex-

periences and insights can help those who want to understand how students see their situation—and may help them to meet the situation more realistically and constructively.

A 1970 graduate of Cornell University, Miss Glanz earned the master of arts degree in teaching at Harvard before she spent a year as teacher and worker in an Israeli kibbutz. In 1972 she joined the faculty of the Lincoln-Sudbury Regional High School in suburban Boston, where she has been a social studies teacher. On leave of absence this year, she is serving as director of the media-arts program of the Educational Collaborative for Greater Boston, Inc.

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Becoming A Student

It was a Tuesday morning, early in February, 1977. I had just finished teaching my fourth period sociology class, and I was exhausted. I had stayed up late the night before, preparing for five classes—especially for this one. Now it was over, and students were sauntering out of the room. Although I had intended and tried to involve them in discussion, I had done most of the talking, and I was tired after nearly an hour's relentlessly hard work.

The class, an elective for upper classmen at Lincoln-Sudbury Regional High School in Sudbury, Massachusetts, was to have been based on a ten-page reading adapted from Philip Slater's *The Pursuit of Loneliness*. For homework, the class had been assigned the essay to read and questions to answer in preparation for class discussion. The discussion never materialized. After a brief introduction, I began asking questions, but students answered cursorily. In fact, few answered at all. I felt as though I were pulling teeth. After several fruitless attempts I despaired, and feelings of failure washed over me. "You're not asking the right questions," I told myself. "You're not motivating them. You're too easy on them. Surely this must not be happening in their science and math classes. The reading was over their heads. No wonder they're turned off." To involve them, I tried asking questions students could answer even if they hadn't done the reading. Gradually, I led the discussion back to ideas I wanted to discuss, and went over the points that I felt were important. By the end of the class, I had "covered" the material. Probably most of my students had "got something" from the class; but I was discouraged. Something was wrong. They had managed to get *me* to do most of the work, and I wondered if they were really thinking and learning.

No time to wonder long; another group was coming in five minutes.

The same day I found in my mailbox a memorandum from the superintendent, David Levington. The memorandum outlined criteria for special projects that faculty members

might undertake the following school year. "The attached set of tentative guidelines for summer workshop projects is *very* different from anything we have done in the past; the emphasis is on teaching rather than subject matter." The memorandum went on to explain that instead of funding the usual summer workshops for curriculum development, the superintendent wanted to fund as many as six projects that could be undertaken during the school year and would last an entire semester. Instead of curriculum development, the emphasis would be on improving teaching and learning in the school.

As Mr. Levington explained, an unresolved issue at Lincoln-Sudbury was how to help teachers improve their effectiveness. A few years before, a number of teachers had experimented with sitting in on each other's classes, discussing their observations, and acting as a support group for each other. They had recommended that released time be provided for all teachers to follow the practice. Although it was tried in several departments, the practice was never established. In addition, a committee on teacher evaluation comprised of faculty, students, and school committee members had recommended that "more consideration . . . be given to the personal growth and support aspect" than to measuring teacher performance. But *that* idea was never developed. Administrators had frequently discussed their role and responsibility in providing assistance and support to classroom activities; but again, no formal support activities had resulted.

For a month or more, I mulled over the superintendent's proposal. I saw it as a tremendous challenge, an opportunity to find answers to questions that had been bothering me for years: How *does* one improve instruction? Why is it that even a concerned, committed faculty is not more successful? And what does "successful" mean anyhow? Why are so many students (and parents) apathetic or disgruntled about the education we provide? How do my classes compare with others? Are we demanding enough? humane enough? How does the "whole picture" fit together for a student? Are students different today from earlier generations, and if they

are, are we responding adequately to the differences?

I talked with Paul Mitchell, my department chairman, and with other faculty members. They shared my concerns and thought my questions worth asking, but none of us knew how to go about finding the answers. At first, we thought about offering a support service for teachers. We might work with any teachers who were interested by being observer/participants, extra sets of eyes and ears in the classroom, to give teachers information about what was happening in their classes. We knew from our own teaching that because teachers were "on" at all times—thinking, talking, listening, trying to develop points, bringing out certain students, quieting down others—they could not know all that was happening in their classes. We felt that teachers knew painfully little. Students rarely commented upon particular classes and, apart from infrequent observation by administrators, teaching was rarely seen or commented upon by other adults. Our support service could meet the needs of teachers who felt they were teaching in a vacuum. We hoped that honest observation and criticism would result in better teaching.

But this idea had difficulties and limitations. How many teachers would actually use our service? Were we being presumptuous in setting ourselves up as experts? And would we really find out how students perceive their own education? Were we still more concerned with teaching than with learning? The more I talked with others, the more I realized that the idea was not quite adequate.

At last, we thought of an alternative. If I wanted to know how students experienced their education, why not actually *be* a student? The idea was a scary one. Since I'd already taught at Lincoln-Sudbury for six years, it would be impossible for me to be incognito, and I wondered whether I could achieve legitimacy with students and teachers. Would teachers teach as they always had, or would they change their classes because of my presence? Would they feel threatened, or refuse to have me in their classes? Would students really open up to me and share their thoughts and feelings? Would I actually be able to find out anything we didn't already know?

The scheme was audacious but intriguing. If I could bring it off, I would gain access to a student world I suspected to be quite separate from the adult-teacher world. I would be able to observe a variety of teaching styles, compare disciplinary methods, and gain insight into how much work we were actually requiring. I might see the same students in different classes, and compare their responses to different teachers.

The possibilities made the idea seem worth trying. I approached Mr. Levington. To my surprise, he was receptive, and he encouraged me to refine the idea and submit a proposal. Although other administrators, many faculty, and all of the school board members were skeptical, my department chairman and superintendent prevailed, and I found myself enrolled as a senior for the following September.

What exactly did I do? First, I decided to divide my semester into three equal time blocks of six weeks. I reasoned that there were many different types of students in the school, and that if I took only one set of courses I would gain only partial insight. By dividing the semester, I would also be able to participate in a broader range of classes. Although I don't like to categorize students, I made some generalizations and decided to enroll in classes with three different types of students: first, academically advanced students bound for our most competitive colleges; second, more "average" students; and finally, the academically unmotivated students in a special program designed by Lincoln-Sudbury to provide extra structure and support. With one of the school's counselors, Barbara Fitzgerald, I perused actual schedules of students. Then and there, we worked out a schedule for my first six weeks—as an advanced student; later, we worked out schedules for the remainder of the semester. Then, I did what all Lincoln-Sudbury students do: I went to each teacher to sign up for my courses.

The science teacher I approached disapproved of my project, and said she'd prefer that I didn't take her course. I chose another, but that one would have required rearranging my entire schedule. Other teachers, nervous at first or hesitant, came round to believing they might benefit from the observa-

tion, and let me in. My worst trauma was being "shut out" of both tennis and archery, and finding that the only physical education course still open was trampoline! (A student friend who was helping me register said trampoline would be good for me.) The entire signing-up procedure took several days and brought me in contact with teachers I'd rarely spoken to, and with parts of the building I'd rarely ventured into. My completed schedule for the first six weeks included advanced expository writing, calculus, a Russian history course called "Things Russian," anatomy and physiology, French V, drawing—and, to be sure, trampoline.

That was late in May. Over the summer, I was often tempted to give up the entire idea and ask for my teaching assignment back; but embarrassment at the thought of backing out, curiosity, and a sense of adventure prevented me. And September came quickly.

It was some time before teachers, students, and I began to feel comfortable. Teachers *were* nervous, and often directed most of their eye contact towards me. Students thought I was "cute," changed their topics of conversation when I approached, and expected me to have one- or two-word witty rejoinders to their endless repetition of, "So how does it *feel* to be a student?" *I* was nervous. I was careful to do everything with students—eat with them, use their bathrooms, "hang out" with them between classes—but I felt I belonged neither in their world nor in the world of teachers, and I was lonely and uncomfortable.

In time, however, the situation brightened. Everyone relaxed. I became part of the personality of my classes, and teachers stopped putting on shows. Students began to accept me, and to be more open with me, as they realized I was facing the same problems they were. Like some of them, I was stumped by calculus and had to drop back to a less advanced section. I, too, sometimes did poorly on tests, and stayed up late doing homework. Occasionally I came unprepared and attempted to cover my lack of effort. Before long, I developed a circle of friends—my "clique"—and once I was kicked out of the library for talking.

Throughout the semester, I kept a journal of my experiences, impressions, and insights. I held weekly discussion sessions after school with interested students and teachers to test my observations and refine my ideas. Either weekly or every other week, I met with the teachers whose classes I was in to discuss my observations and suggestions, and to talk about any problems we noticed. I also wrote two long reports to the school community. If I had success, it was in working individually with teachers for class improvement, and in identifying and making sense of some of the key issues that press high school educators today. What follows are some of the observations and impressions that came through this teacher's experience as a student in her own school.

A Separate World

One of the most striking features of my life as a student was the separateness of my classmates' reality from the adult, official world of the school. In conversation after conversation, in library, cafeteria, hallways, or gym, I found myself and my new friends discussing some variation of one of several very familiar themes—the opposite sex, clothes, friends, sports, TV or movies, records, personal appearance, work, or college. Ideas raised in classes were never discussed after class. *Teachers* were discussed—not as full human beings but as people who made demands on students' time. I had always hoped that students were interested enough in my classes to think about and to discuss the points I raised outside of class. For the most part, I had been—oh, so wrong!

Both the images of the teachers and the shallowness of the conversations distressed me. For many students, teachers seem to be one-dimensional authority figures—joy-less and personality-less people. Because of their role as adults in a world of teenagers, teachers necessarily emphasize their "moral," adult, responsible sides. Moreover, the discreteness of much of the subject matter from the teacher's own life and the

desire to be "professional" often prevent him from bringing much of his life experience into class. The result is that students see teachers as half-people who are less than human. (How often have I run into a student in a supermarket who exclaims, "What are *you* doing here?") An extension of this separation is the distinction students make between the responsible behavior they expect of teachers and their own irresponsible behavior. The danger is that many project their consciences onto the teachers; they don't have to act responsibly because the teacher will keep them in line. This thinking is reinforced by a society which makes sharp distinctions between behavior deemed appropriate for youth and behavior deemed appropriate for adults, and fails to see that both need to be integrated into one well-balanced whole at all age levels.

Since relationships between students and teachers are dominated by the role each plays, "real life," full-bodied relationships are developed among adolescents themselves in the rather closed, tightly regulated social world of the school. It is within this adolescent society that preoccupations about status, self-image, and "measuring up" are worked out and these preoccupations have important implications for teachers. They must recognize that they are competing for a limited portion of every student's time and energy; for if students are caught up in worrying about who they are and in measuring themselves against peers, they have relatively small amounts of energy left for school work. Because some teachers make very specific demands on student time, others, who count on intellectual excitement and curiosity about subject matter or the strength of their own personalities, have a difficult motivational task. Even without having to worry about boyfriends or college, I found myself doing shorter, more concrete assignments first, and putting off the ones that required long-term planning. And I was more likely to do an assignment that required both reading and writing, than one that required only reading—even if the reading was interesting. Out of class, so many things compete for students' attention that anything not immediately required tends to be put off. As one student told me, "Mr. So-and-so thinks his sub-

ject is the center of the universe. It's not. As soon as I leave his class, I put it completely out of my mind until the next day. I have much more important things to think about." This girl may not have been typical, and I don't think teachers should all stop giving long-range assignments; but they should understand why students put assignments off, and perhaps redouble efforts to get them started or make parts of assignments due before others.

Since students hold power over each other in the game for status, the influence of peer pressure is enormous. The group is an important source of belonging and safety, and it often determines a student's choice of classes as well as his attitude toward teachers, homework, activities outside class, and school in general. When I asked why they took a certain course, most students told me that they chose it because their friends were in it. One pointed out, "Kids feel pressure to conform. Everyone needs friends." Another stated, "There are areas in the school that you don't really feel comfortable hanging around in—you feel, this isn't my area. The cliques are intense. We don't go to events that other cliques dominate."

Unfortunately, the influence of peers is not always the most desirable kind. I felt a subtle yet persistent pressure not to be over-eager: not to be a "goody-goody" or "teacher's pet," not to work too hard, not to arrive in class too early, get overly excellent grades, or care too much about what I was learning in class. To be sure, I'm overgeneralizing, for there *are* many students who value doing well (and especially, getting good grades as differentiated from enjoying learning), but these are in the minority. It was easier for me as a student to tell others I didn't understand (or do) the homework than it was to say I understood it all—it made me "one of the guys." This anti-intellectualism is both a reflection of our society and an anti-authority attitude among adolescents: the school has power; the school says to study; therefore not studying is a way of asserting oneself.

An unspoken struggle for power and control is one of the dominant elements in the lives of both students and teachers. Because adolescents are making the transition from parental

control to independence, they need to feel that they have some authority and responsibility in their lives. For reasons I'll describe later, most don't. Bespeaking the powerlessness they feel, they "get back" in the easiest way they know, by resisting authority and by small sabotages and subtle acts of annoyance. In many of my classes, teachers arrived to find chalk and erasers missing, students coming late or coming without books, pencil, paper, or handouts from the day before. Sometimes they went over relatively easy material three or four times, and students still didn't "get it." Yet they knew all the lyrics to many rock songs, TV jingles, and minute details about sports and TV stars. They were not stupid; they were resisting learning things they did not deem important.

The half-person mentality dehumanizes both teachers and students, and fosters a we-they adversarial situation in which neither side understands why the other acts as it does. The battle for power continues without either's acknowledging that it exists. A teacher has the genuinely difficult job of getting a certain amount of information across to 25-30 individuals. Any non-compliance is inevitably seen on some levels as a thwarting of what the teacher wants to do and a challenge to his authority or capacity to interest, even when the reasons are valid. It's as though teachers are angry that the students won't play their game. And because educators are reluctant to admit that the game goes on, they have not really thought about ways to harness the obvious strength of peer pressure to help achieve the goals they believe in. I found the teacher-versus-student contest particulary strong in less advanced classes. There was little pretense of interest in material, and a general attitude of, "What do I have to do to get through this?" In several of my classes, particularly those with younger students, teachers faced comments like "This is boring," "Can we leave?" "Why do we have to do this?" and "Why don't you ever let us out early?" three or four times over the hour. In many cases, the students mimicked teachers every time they pronounced a word incorrectly, made a mistake, or did anything the students deemed "weird."

The ultimate battle, of course, is over grades. For while

many are not convinced they need to know what we teach, they do believe they need good grades to get into a good college and achieve material success in life. Pressure for grades is especially strong in the more advanced classes. Sometimes a teacher digressed or the class discussion went into an unplanned (but often interesting) direction. After a while, I could predict the virtually inevitable result. A student usually interrupted and queried, "Do we have to know this?" which translates into, "Will this be on the next test?" If the teacher answered, "No, this is just for your own information," students promptly tuned out.

The phenomenon of grade inflation is real, although some of the causes are ignored by critics. Among my Lincoln-Sudbury schoolmates, the belief existed that the primary responsibility for their achievement rested with the teacher: it was his responsibility to teach well rather than their responsibility to learn carefully. When they did poorly on a difficult test, they generally blamed their teacher for not preparing them adequately, and pressed to have their grades curved upward. As a teacher, I have had students who argued that if I failed them, the reflection on my teaching would be poor, even though they had done virtually no work in my course. As a student, I knew of parents who called the school to complain of low grades their children received, arguing, "He showed up for class every day," as if that were the criterion for passing. Whether teachers submit or not, such pressure is disconcerting, and publicized lack of faith in education serves only to foster their self-doubts.

Among students, the games played to get good grades are openly acknowledged. As one told me, "You learn how to play up to teachers you don't like or respect, smile at their little jokes, just because you want good grades." Another added, "For so many years you're looking toward college. Who cares about high school? You do everything to look good on your record." Another was upset with herself for having taken demanding courses: "The colleges won't know. And my father won't let me have a job if I get C's. I should have taken dummy courses instead of hard ones."

The we-they adversarial attitude has another implication as well. The shallowness of teenage conversations was indicative of the fact that schools are still turning teenagers back in upon themselves and not really providing them with outlets for constructive interaction with people of different ages, and different class, ethnic, geographic, and racial backgrounds. The problem lies both in the structure of teacher-student relationships and in the fact that the schools themselves are isolated, comparatively closed communities where students seldom interact with people who are not teachers, not administrators, not students, not parents or parents' friends.

First, the problem within the schools. If teachers are seen primarily in classes and as role-players rather than as people, then students miss knowing and learning from the many interesting people on any school faculty—people from diverse backgrounds with a wide variety of experiences, who just might turn students on to a love of learning, enthusiasm for a field, or curiosity about the world. Some teachers succeed in communicating these enthusiasms and interests in their classes; many don't. I often heard students describing teachers as drips, bores, and numerous varieties of idiots. Yet I knew that many of these same people had traveled the world over, conducted fascinating experiments or learned three languages, or were accomplished musicians, artists, or athletes.

Second, the problem outside the schools. Students suffer from the lack of association with people different from themselves. They have inaccurate perceptions of themselves and others; they stereotype other groups; they either disdain or fear anyone unlike themselves. Many in the suburban town of Sudbury, 20 miles from Boston, had never been to the city nor had any desire to go. They had never talked with city students except for those bused to Sudbury in a special program; they had never spoken with adults in a wide range of careers, never been to an art museum or live theatre. No wonder they were bored so much of the time.

The Overlay of Compulsion

"Today, class, we will discuss the trigonometric functions. Who knows what 'sine' means?"

The world of students is separate, and it is overlaid with compulsion. I was curious to discover how different other teachers' classes were from those I attended as a child and a teenager. As a student now, I found that for the most part they were not very different. Most teachers teach in much the same way they were taught—in an essentially didactic, teacher-centered mode. Often this mode is dictated by the subject matter, which is outside the students' intuitive experience; the teacher knows the material and presents it to students, whose role is to "absorb" it. It is important to examine the strengths and weaknesses of this practice, for it has implications for the way students experience learning and for the way they perceive school.

In most of the classes I took, it was the teacher who determined the plan, the pace, and the specific activities for the day. This is as it should be, since presumably the teacher knows the subject, knows from experience what is within the interest and ability of the class, and knows how to present material so that students can assimilate it. To enforce their learning, the easiest and most common method of developing motivation is to use grades, and the easiest format for presenting material is the lecture. In a lecture, the teacher *tells* the class what he thinks is important, although he may modify the telling by asking questions that call for specific answers.

The system has many benefits. In the first place, it is a very efficient method of conveying information and making sure that material is retained, at least over a short span of time. A teacher can emphasize what needs to be emphasized, make difficult concepts understandable, and present summaries of what years of experience have shown to be important. Moreover, this teacher-centered, didactic model conforms with the community's expectations about what education should be. Parents had the same kind of experience in school, and feel comfortable that this is what their children are having. The

system makes a nice reinforcement of values between school and family.

By mastering a given body of information, students can feel that they've learned and achieved, and teachers can feel they have accomplished something tangible and measurable. There are clear expectations, narrow boundaries between what is acceptable and what is not acceptable. Beyond this, the challenge of mastery gives a sense of seriousness of purpose and accomplishment. The system teaches students to deal with pressure and stress, and to live up to others' expectations of them. If the teacher is able to set challenges that go beyond what students have previously done but not beyond their reach, students can stretch their minds to learn and grow. Teacher-centered instruction sometimes has the effect of forcing students to think about topics they find fascinating but would never have approached on their own. In the best situations, a teacher's passions and enthusiasms and ways of seeing the world become those of his students.

Yet there are serious liabilities in this way of keeping school, and the liabilities help to account for some of the problems schools face today.

Perhaps above all, the system encourages incredible passivity. In most classes one sits and listens. Some concentration is necessary, but no matter how interesting the teacher, after a number of hours of sitting and listening, boredom almost inevitably follows. In one class during my second week as a student, I noticed half way through the hour that much of the class was either doodling, fidgeting, or sleeping. Before long, I found my own mind wandering too. The interesting fact was that this was reputed to be one of the best classes in the school, with a dynamic, provocative teacher. I realized that what was boring was *not* what the teacher was saying but the very act of sitting and listening for the fourth hour in a row. (I realized this with some sense of relief, for as a teacher, I had always blamed student inattentiveness on myself for not being challenging enough, dynamic enough, or whatever.) It is difficult for teachers to feel *how* passive the student's role is, for the role of teacher is the essence of activity. When I taught,

my mind was going constantly: figuring out how to best present an idea, thinking about whom to call on, whom to draw out, whom to shut up; how to get students involved, how to make my point clearer, how to respond; when to be funny, when serious. As a student I experienced little of this; everything was done *to* me. This inactivity partially explains why students sometimes fail to grasp material even after we've gone over it several times; for in teaching ideas, one must process them, work with them, really understand them; but in listening to ideas, only a minimal degree of concentration is required.

Our class methods also promote the feeling that students have little control over or responsibility for their own education. Central to understanding this lack of responsibility is the fact that the agenda for the class is the teacher's; it is the teacher who is convinced that the subject matter is worth knowing and that the specific activities planned are the best ways of obtaining this knowledge. Students are often not convinced of this, and sometimes do not see why they have to know or do what the teacher asks. In my chemistry class, the teacher started off a day's lesson with a question: "If you were a chemist, why would it be important to know what moles mean?" "We're *not* chemists," was the immediate reply. Students are products of a society which no longer automatically assumes that "teacher knows best." Without the legitimacy that assumption gives, teachers face a serious motivational task wherein they must convince students that what *they* think is worth knowing *is* worth knowing.

Although we say we want to encourage responsibility, we really give little opportunity for students to make a real difference in the way a class goes, aside from doing their homework and participating. There is little sense, as there is in the business world, that anyone is depending on them to "come through." If they come unprepared, in most cases the class goes on anyway, and students don't really feel the immediate consequences of their lack of effort in terms of hurting other people.

One day, my English teacher surprised me. The night before, he had given us a short story to read. I had done the assignment as I did many: cursorily. I skimmed the story without really thinking about it, assuming that the teacher would tell us the significance of the story the next day in class. At my own suggestion (which I had forgotten), the teacher surprised us with a new class procedure. He asked two students to go up to the front of the room and lead the class in a discussion of the story.

I panicked. I realized that I had counted on him to do my work. With students leading the discussion, I would have to participate more, for they would not necessarily have the "right" interpretation. Besides, I would have to help them out so they'd help me if I was asked to lead a future discussion.

The discussion was only fair; the intended leaders did not really know how to lead, and many others had not done the reading at all. After ten minutes of struggle, the student leaders asked suddenly, "Hey, why aren't you guys participating?" What followed was a frank assessment of the state of the class: many students were expecting to sit back and listen to the teacher; others had more pressing written assignments in other classes and so had not done the reading; others didn't like the choice of stories. The teacher informed us that he would continue using this method and that if we wanted to get anything out of these stories, we'd better come prepared to participate.

Gradually, the quality of the discussions improved. Students were far more attentive, and the teacher learned when and how to intervene to lead the discussion in productive directions without taking control. I thought about the stories far more than I had previously, and felt a greater commitment to the class.

I do not think that this method should be used by all teachers or by any teacher all of the time. (I think all teachers should develop a variety of techniques they feel comfortable with, and then use the one that is most appropriate for any given lesson.) Certainly, teacher-led discussions are effective

and far more efficient in conveying information than the method used here. Yet this example points to the lack of responsibility and investment felt by many students—a lack that actually impedes their ability to learn. As one told me, "It doesn't matter whether you do the work or not. The class will continue whether or not you've done your homework." Another stated, "In a lot of classes where you have outside reading, the reading is either unrelated, or the teacher will lecture and explain the reading anyway, so you figure, "Why should I read it? They're just going to explain it; they're going to give me the summary. So why bother?"

This lack of responsibility is exacerbated by the community's expectation and demand, transmitted to students, that it is the teacher's job to "train" the students and to maintain strict authority and control over students, to prepare them for what many envision as a rigidly structured business world in which people must submit and conform. At the same time, many in the community have lost faith in the educational system and in teachers. They no longer assume that teachers have professional expertise and know what they're doing. So it is that while many parents (and students) want teachers to be "in control," at the same time they challenge teachers' expertise and authority. As I have suggested before, there is a tendency among some students and parents to feel that poor student performance is caused by poor teaching rather than poor learning. If students feel that a class isn't going as well as it might, they tend to blame the teacher behind his back and only rarely go in to ask about the way the class is being run and talk about ways it might be improved on both sides of the desk. They feel little personal responsibility for the way the class is going. "You've got to make the kids feel that it's *their* fault if a class isn't good," one student suggested.

To encourage responsibility, and to encourage students to take a more active role in their own education, teachers need more accurate, on-going information from students about their classes. With the teacher doing most of the work, there is a danger of losing students, not knowing whether they're lost,

bored, tuned out, or confused. All too often I have talked with (or overheard) students, and then talked with the teacher of their class, and found their perceptions to be quite different.

There is a strong disinclination on the part of students to ask questions, partly because they think they'll look "dumb," and partly because it will appear to their peers that they care too much about learning. There is also a strong disinclination to talk with teachers after class or to make suggestions for fear of hurting the teacher's feelings and having a grade lowered. This was especially true in my less advanced classes, where students adhered more strongly to their roles and seemed to feel quite powerless, as they felt generally in school. One of them told me, "I wouldn't want to tell a teacher how he should run his class, but I wish *someone* would." Often they discussed with me privately after class strengths or weaknesses of a particular course, or talked about things they wished teachers would do. When I suggested that they talk to the teacher involved, they almost always said they feared reprisals from the teacher, or felt that suggestions from a student were out of place. Yet it has been my experience that students are quite sensible and usually fair; and both their individual assessments and their grapevine usually paralleled pretty closely my own observations about a teacher or a course.

Beyond this, our class methods often promote the ideas that learning is taking down copious notes and that knowledge is passing it back on a test. They discourage students from trusting their own observations or insights and from asking questions. They also discourage students from listening to each other, for "knowledge is what the teacher tells you." Real intellectual curiosity or pursuing any subject beyond requirements tends to be discouraged because there is so much that *must* be mastered that there is little time for anything else. Many students don't really learn *how* to learn, how to follow up a question they're curious about, or why they should want to learn, except to get good grades for college and to please their parents. The pressure on a "good" student taking a heavy load is often so great that the student must do a little

of everything but can do nothing really well. For some, there is literally no time to pursue a subject and still have time to live their lives. This stress takes a toll on students and encourages a tell-me-what-I-have-to-do-and-get-off-my-back attitude. For many, there are two choices: do everything that's expected at the price of living under constant anxiety, or "opt out" completely and do the very minimum, because the whole undertaking is awesome. School becomes a process of doing as little as one can and getting away with as much as one can. This was true even for me, and I'm a person committed to education, who loves learning. I found myself manipulating my way out of several classes and assignments, and turning in shoddy work to get it out of the way because I didn't have time to do better. If I did it, they do it.

A case in point is homework. As an average student, I had far less homework than I did in more advanced classes: perhaps a half hour a night, compared with the two-and-a-half to three hours I had as an advanced student. Although I could usually dash it off in between classes or in a free period, I occasionally ran out of time.

One evening, my husband and I took part in what I considered to be an important social occasion. Friends had just bought a new house, and we went over with a bottle of wine to celebrate. (Students also sometimes participate in valid social engagements but more often watch up to six hours of TV a night.) Unfortunately, this was a school night, and I appeared in school the next day unprepared. I considered my options: confess openly to the teacher, copy someone else's sheet, or make up an excuse. The third course was perhaps the most widely used, and I nervously approached my teacher with a fabrication. I had *wanted* to do my homework, I claimed, but the sine tables needed to complete the assignment had been ripped from the book. "Kids today," he commiserated. "They probably ripped the tables out to sneak into an exam." Outfitted with a new book (my teacher never even checked the old one), I entered class with much relief.

I soon realized my fabrication had been unnecessary. Virtually no one, it seemed, had done the homework. Student

after student mumbled responses when called upon, and seemed not to understand the assignment. Finally, the teacher, thinking that it must have been difficult, went over each question at the board while students copied the problems at their seats. The teacher had "covered" the material and the students had listened to the explanation, but had anything been learned? I don't think so.

I found this kind of situation common. In many classes, people simply didn't do the work assigned, but copied from someone else or manipulated the teacher into doing the work for them.

Homework and the Larger Malaise

So what? Is homework important anyway? Do teachers assign it because it's expected and because they had to suffer through it themselves?

Given my observations about teacher-centered classes, I think homework is important for a number of reasons. Homework can help a teacher and student to pinpoint problems. It furthers the course work so that class time does not have to be taken up doing things that can easily be done by students on their own: applying and practicing methods taught in class (math, language, science), reading articles or texts to be discussed (history, English, science), or thinking about issues raised or to be raised in class (English, history). By using homework as an adjunct to class work, the teacher can accomplish far more in the course of a year.

An important function of homework is to prepare students for a discussion or lab course, where they are responsible for active participation. It is the tangible manifestation of our assumption that students share responsibility for the way a class goes. I think we fail to emphasize sufficiently that when one student neglects homework it hurts others. In discussion classes, the discussion obviously suffers, since students are unable to hear each other's views. They are unable to "test out" their ideas and hear others react. And in classes where

skills are taught, unprepared students hurt others by forcing teachers to spend time going over material already taught, instead of progressing on to new ideas. It would be good if we could exploit peer pressure to get the better motivated students to influence their less motivated classmates, yet this is difficult in an environment where even the achievers are not always convinced of the value of the work they do, and where competition and individualism are so heavily stressed.

Finally, in a system which suffers from too much teacher-centered classroom activity, homework provides an opportunity for the student actively to work with the material presented in class. I feel more strongly than ever that a student best learns when he himself comes face to face with the problem, issue, or idea which he must grapple with and solve, *not* when he watches someone else do it. If this is true, homework is critically important. Tests should never come as surprises: students should know the material because they have worked with it both in class and at home.

Yet from the way many teachers deal with homework, an observer would conclude that they are not really convinced of its importance. If teachers truly believe that their assignments are important, they should act on that belief by making it imperative for students to do them. A teacher who feels that homework is not essential, but merely busy work to occupy student time should not give it, so that his students will have more time to spend on homework for other classes.

The question remains: how have we gotten ourselves into this situation? Why isn't the system working the way it was set up to? Why aren't students learning as much as we and the community want them to? For the homework problem and the lack of student effort are merely symptoms of a larger malaise.

Teachers feel strong pressure to make every class period a worthwhile learning experience. In most cases they believe it is their job to make classes good; but of course students and parents think so, too, and a teacher's ego is often on the line. Regrettably this puts them in a position of having to make

classes a success whether students are prepared or not. Hence their actions undermine their words, for though we say we want to encourage students to act responsibly (do their homework, participate in class), "the show goes on" even when they have done nothing. And because students often don't do their work, teachers have learned not to count on it. Students know *that*, and the circle becomes vicious.

My own experience and conversation with many others leads me to feel that teachers sometimes don't assign more work simply because they don't have the time or energy to grade the papers and prepare interesting classes. They are asked to serve on myriad committees, advise students, do library and cafeteria duty, fill out student recommendations and core evaluation run-downs, break up fights in the hall, check for students smoking, keep an eye on the bathrooms, and be ready to help students whenever they have academic or social problems. I know of few teachers who get much work done in school. Especially for those with five classes, it is virtually impossible to assign as much work as students could handle and to maintain a sane personal or family life. It is evident that the administration and the community will have to think hard about their priorities, for teachers cannot do everything. In addition, the steady criticism from the community has hurt teacher morale far more than has thus far been recognized. Most teachers work hard and are proud of their efforts, but when neither their efforts nor their professional expertise is recognized or appreciated, they become resentful.

From the students' point of view, there are several conditions that contribute to their lack of effort. In the first place, students share the strong human tendency to do only what one has to do, especially when one doesn't especially like the task at hand. More than once I caught myself not even bothering to attempt difficult homework problems because I knew the teacher would go over them the next day. Beyond this, students complain that a major part of what they are asked to do is busywork, assigned not because it helps their understanding but simply because teachers feel they should

give homework. Teachers might get more students to do the work if they explained why it was important.

Perhaps few appreciate the fact that increasing numbers of students work after school, leaving little time for outside study. According to one survey, roughly 40 percent of Lincoln-Sudbury students hold after school jobs. I know of several who work 40-hour weeks. The percentage is substantial enough to warrant a frank discussion with students and parents about priorities. While I recognize that families need added income and that jobs can provide students with a sense of responsibility and dignity they often lack in school, I think parents should realize that their children's learning may suffer. As it is, many students feel pressured by conflicting demands of job, home, and school.

More profoundly, there is a feeling on the part of some students that effort has little value. Recent developments in our society, such as widespread unemployment among professionals and college graduates, lead some to conclude that effort in school does not necessarily "pay off." Others, seeing political scandal and corruption at all levels, learn that their future depends not so much on honest effort as on getting ahead any way one can. I sometimes estimated that half to two-thirds of a class cheated on a given test. Worse, I've encountered students who feel no remorse about cheating, but are annoyed that a teacher has confronted them on their actions. In addition, the awesomeness of our political, social, and economic system and the failure in students' eyes of the student movement of the late Sixties contribute to their sense of powerlessness and cynicism. This in turn leads students to feel that success depends not on hard work but on luck and "who you know." This new mentality is not shared by all and it is often not conscious; but it affects the world view of a significant number, and leads some students to do little work, especially if they are not succeeding in school. It also serves as a convenient rationalization for laziness and fear of failure.

Schooling depends upon reading and writing. Despite our protestations, some students remain unconvinced of the value or necessity of mastering reading and writing skills. They

know they need these skills to get into college, but don't really see their application in adult life. Teachers have not been successful at communicating their own belief in the value of books, or their commitment to the worth of being well-rounded, well-informed or learned individuals in a pragmatic society that increasingly sees education as job preparation. In a society where people watch the nightly news instead of reading the newspaper, talk on the telephone instead of writing letters, and watch TV or go to the movies for pleasure instead of reading books, some students conclude that the skills of reading and writing are unnecessary.

Finally, the lack of support and respect teachers get from the community undermines their authority to make demands and to have students suffer the consequences if they fail to live up to them. Parents seem somewhat ambivalent in what they want. They want teachers to "crack down," but often complain if their children receive bad grades. They seem to be saying, "Crack down on other kids, but not on ours." And students also use the school's responsiveness to parents to go over teachers' heads. I've heard any number of students say, "I'll just have my parents call the school to make sure I get what I want," whether it's a chance to improve a bad grade or the chance to get into a class that's already filled. The effect is to create an atmosphere in which many students feel quite comfortable complaining about the amount of work they have or the grades they receive, and the pressure on teachers to lighten assignments, postpone due dates, and not give failing grades is fairly constant.

Nor, it may be said, do enough parents take a share in stressing the value of education. Taking students to Colorado for two weeks, taking them out of school for dentist appointments or Christmas shopping, allowing them to work after school in spite of the fact that they are behind in their work—all reflect the parents' attitudes that these activities are more important than schoolwork. Yet the same parents may complain when their children do poorly. A commitment to help students learn must come from parents as well as teachers; it is too easy to blame the school.

In this context, it is evident that course requirements have an effect upon each other. If in one class the demands are more immediate (especially if it is a difficult class where knowledge is cumulative and students are quickly lost if they fall behind), students will tend to do this work first and may never get to the work for another class where they are being encouraged to explore material on their own or where the material is "softer." The pressure is sometimes so great that as soon as one teacher lets up or makes concessions to students falling behind, he feels the full flood of students doing work in other classes first. Some teachers assume that students are always prepared and put severe penalties on falling behind; others ask, "How many have done the reading?" and adjust to the situation. Some tolerate late papers; others give a zero if the paper is not done by the class period in which it is due. With such variations, it is easy to see what a student will do first. When two of my classes consistently demanded an hour's homework a night, I sometimes did not get to my other assignments. Perhaps faculties need to talk about reasonable expectations for rigorous, average, and less rigorous classes. And they need to spell out more clearly at scheduling time roughly how much homework each week or each night is expected so that students can choose classes accordingly. And counselors might take care to encourage advanced students to concentrate say, on three or four very demanding classes rather than on five or six.

Still another impact of some classes on others comes from the gift of some teachers to be genuinely entertaining. Television and the movies may make young people feel that life should always be entertaining, but I think schools contribute. Some of the most successful teachers *are* entertaining, and their classes are delightful. Yet if a class demands nothing more than to sit back and enjoy, students come to believe that learning is easy and effortless. I'm afraid that after having some classes that are entertaining, they expect entertainment in all their classes, and "turn off" in those that are not immediately pleasurable. This attitude creates pressures on all teachers to be fascinating four or five times a day, five days a

week—a difficult expectation to live up to. As one girl described her feelings, "You're spoon-fed in most classes all the time, so that when you go into a class where the teacher expects you to be intellectually curious, you can't make the switch."

There is a heavy overlay of compulsion in making people do things they may not want to do. As much as teachers struggle to make the system more humane and interesting, they are still only sweetening a pill which students are forced to swallow. For while they and society encourage students to know themselves, develop interests, and express their will on the one hand, on the other hand schools socialize them to submit; they *must* be in certain places at certain times, *must* deal with people they may not want to, and *must* do things they may not want to do. This is what socialization is all about; most people consider this "training" inevitable in education, necessary preparation for jobs which require sacrificing individual wills for larger goals or for the good of the group. Yet what educators encounter daily are young people who are *just beginning* to learn these lessons and do not give in easily.

Facing Realities Realistically

What can we do about the issues I've raised? We must realize that in all likelihood, despite the problems I've described, classes will remain basically as they are right now. In most cases, the nature of the subject taught—from math to anatomy, French, Greek history—dictates an essentially didactic class model, since the subject matter is not known intuitively by students and must be transmitted from teacher to student. And the ultimate authority and control will and should remain with the teacher. I don't think we should adopt a model of instruction in which the teacher comes in and says, "What do you want to do today?" The separate worlds of adults/teachers and adolescents/students are inevitable; the two groups are not peers, and can't be. Yet it is not unrealistic

to suppose that these realities can be made less formidable, less of an obstacle to learning. If our schools are to serve the ends of education, we'd better look for ways.

A first step toward ending this battle is to convince students that what we attempt to teach them is genuinely worth knowing. (And before this step is taken, we must be sure ourselves that what we are teaching *is* worth knowing.) We can no longer assume that students act on faith in the educational process, as most of us may have done in earlier generations. When I was a teenager in school, I usually assumed that teachers knew what they were doing, even when I didn't always see the point myself; I trusted that it would all make sense in the end. Students no longer make this assumption. Many I spoke with often questioned whether what they were learning was really necessary for them to know, and they often decided that it wasn't. Depending on who they were, they either tuned out, crammed the material into their heads so they could get good grades, or resisted. But behind their responses was the view that what their teachers were asking was an unnecessary imposition on their time and energy. Grumbled comments of "Why do we have to know this?" and "This is a waste of time" were common in many of the classes. Often such comments were not really addressed by the teachers, who took the position, "Do this because I'm asking you to." While this may have been enough for earlier generations, it does not convince today's students, and so elicits only surface compliance and passive resistance.

Clearly, one direction is to continue to search for ways for students to be more active in their own education, more responsible for what goes on in class, and more capable of giving constructive reactions and suggestions to teachers. Not only must we explain to students why they need to know what we're teaching them, but we must also involve them more fully in their education. We need to make sure that they come to class prepared, and we must have the courage *not* to fill in when significant numbers are not ready for the day's lesson. And we should fail students when they deserve to fail. Our attention must be centered on the effort and responsibility

students take to learn, and we must emphasize that learning is an active process on the part of the learner, not the teacher.

Teachers need to build into their regular class routines some reliable means of finding out, at every step of the way, what is clear and what is not—how what they think they're doing is actually getting across to students. Teachers often try to operate in a vacuum. Occasional questionnaires during a course (not just one questionnaire at the end) might help to fill the vacuum by encouraging students to *say* how their work is going. Journals in which students write ideas they have about classwork, or logs in which they keep track of times when they are confused could also be used. Above all, teachers need to talk with students as much as possible. It doesn't follow that they must change their methods, but only that their methods will be more effective if they know for a certainty what's working and what isn't.

I think we make too much distinction between advanced and average classes. What we fail to remember is that generally one student is likely to be taking advanced science, math, history, language, and English, while another is taking courses geared to more average ability. The advanced student is overburdened, while the average student could be doing more. We could ease up a bit in our harder courses and demand more in the less rigorous ones.

Interestingly, though the classes I took as an average student were predominantly teacher-centered, there tended to be more interaction between teacher and students and more variety of teaching methods in them than in my advanced classes. I think teachers felt less pressure to cover material, and they also knew their average students would not sit still through an hour-long lecture. Of my six average classes, only two were regularly lectures. I wonder whether some of the practices used in those classes might not be used in more advanced classes without sacrificing course content.

In all situations, it is important to reinforce learning by having students act on it, apply it, or carry it farther themselves. By the time a test comes around, it may be too

late. Techniques will vary with subject matter, but the principle is the same. In math or science, students can work at their seats on a problem similar to one the teacher has just gone over, or pair up to try a new kind of problem. In English or history, they can read and comment critically on each other's papers or work in small groups. In any class, teachers need to check frequently to see if there are questions—and have the nerve to wait through long, awkward silences for students to respond. The more active students are in figuring out, applying, and working with information, the better they learn it.

Teachers also need to clarify their expectations of students, and work more closely with them and with their parents to create a situation in which they are likely to meet those expectations. We might add to the course-selection sheet a space to estimate the total weekly study/homework time they ought to spend to earn a grade of "A" or "B" in each course. If we add spaces for team practice or other extracurricular activity hours (and job hours, too), they and their parents could plan school programs allowing for a realistic total number of hours. We might even make contracts with parents, emphasizing their responsibilities in helping their sons and daughters learn. For example, parents might contract to provide adequate space and time to study, to check if their child has done his homework, and to call his teacher when serious problems loom. The contract could also explain the implications of taking students out of school for unscheduled vacations or for shopping, or for permitting them to work after school.

Above all, we must define carefully what we can and cannot accomplish and explain that clearly, so that the expectations of parents and students are consonant with our own. We simply cannot do everything that the community is currently asking us to do and do it all well. It would be better to narrow our scope, and to engage students and parents in working together to accomplish what we realistically can.

Perhaps we could also reduce the overlay of compulsion by arranging school routine so that students have time they can truly call their own during the school day. Such time would

help to give them a sense of control over their own lives, a feeling that they are not always being told what to do. As a high-powered Lincoln-Sudbury senior, I had an hour or two of unscheduled time every day, and this was important to me. Usually I went to the library or cafeteria, where I caught up on homework or talked with other students. Sometimes I used the time to be by myself or to talk with a teacher if I hadn't understood something or simply wanted to chat. (I was not a typical student, but there were others who did talk with teachers and did consider them as people.) The time also provided some variety in my schedule, lessening the boredom of routine.

Perhaps most important, unscheduled time gave me the opportunity to discipline myself, to decide for myself whether I needed to study or do homework, or whether I had time to talk with my friends. It gave me a completely different feeling from having someone stand over my head, and the feeling is necessary for self-discipline. By giving students time to themselves, we probably make life more difficult for teachers, counselors, and administrators. Students are probably more docile when they are more completely controlled. Yet I feel that the opportunity for self-control must be provided for those who can handle it, because it is a necessary preparation for living in a rapidly changing, somewhat chaotic world where one has to take initiative and responsibility for his own actions. I came to know many students who lived up to this responsibility beautifully.

Of course, this idea presents difficulties. Ideally, all students should have time they can call their own during the school day. Even those who "can't handle it" should have some. Recognizing that students are different in their degrees of maturity, schools need to develop schedules that vary in structure and discipline, and make it possible for students and parents to choose the one they feel most appropriate. An open system that provides free time is not appropriate for everyone, but neither is a tightly structured, tightly disciplined one.

If we can provide a system with flexibility, we must allow students to feel the consequences when they don't act respon-

sibly. Sometimes we cushion them from feeling the pain of their mistakes. As a student, I was able to get away with not doing assignments and missing classes; and as a teacher, I've been approached by counselors to give students credit for courses they have failed if they made up some of the work. I don't think this does them any favor, although individual situations are complex and we must use good judgment in each case. (In my own case as a student, I'm sure teachers assumed I had valid excuses for missing class or coming unprepared; and sometimes, I did). If we want students to choose to act responsibly, we must give them incentive by rewarding them when they do and punishing them when they don't.

Finally, if we give students room to grow and explore on their own, we need to watch as carefully as we can to make sure they aren't failing miserably. Certainly, they should be allowed to experience failure; the experience is an important lesson for coping with life. Yet there is a point when the failure becomes overwhelming and destructive. Students told me, "It's possible to flounder around here," and, "I wasted my whole sophomore year." If an open system is to work, there must be concerned adults who can find out when students are slipping, and who have time and energy to do something about it. Students often emphasized to me that when they were lost, they didn't want to be slapped automatically into a more structured program but wanted support and guidance from adults. Yet teachers with five classes have little time or energy left to work with individual students. Taxpayers should realize that as more and more is expected of teachers and counselors, teachers and counselors have less and less time and energy to look out for and to work with individual students.

It is important, too, to think about activities away from school—planned and sponsored by school—that will enhance the development of the student's sense of responsibility. To become productive, healthy, contributing members of a society, students need not only strong academic preparation; they also need experiences where others are depending on them, chances to work cooperatively with others, opportunities to

meet others whose backgrounds and ages are different from their own, and chances to see what the world outside the school is like. I believe that there is not only time to provide these experiences and sound academic preparation, but that community activities would facilitate students' mastery of their academic subjects, too. Currently, there is much time wasted and much resistance to learning. Responsible activity outside the school might contribute to increased purpose, maturity, and enthusiasm that would carry over to the classroom.

In thinking back over my semester as a student, I realize that only rarely did school put me in positions of real responsibility where others were depending on my actions, or positions where I was working cooperatively with others to get a mutually beneficial job done. By not providing students with these opportunities, we rob them of a sense of dignity and self-worth derived from feeling that they are needed by others and that they have contributed to work they value. We also rob society of citizens willing to work for goals beyond their own self-interest.

Community service programs or internships—working at an elementary school, in a day care or health center, a prison, a museum, on a farm, in a business—can enlarge students' conceptions of adult working and living. And unlike the mindless drudgery of many jobs open to teenagers, activities of this kind put them in positions of responsibility for others. Such work can be complementary to traditional academic classes and "book learning," using different kinds of energy and calling for different kinds of responsibility. Young people need both, and it is worth remembering that only in recent generations have most students not also been workers.

Programs I have observed include semester-long internships (most effective in the second semester of senior year, when students are biding time until graduation). In Lincoln-Sudbury's Alternative Semester Program, students work on a volunteer basis and live with host families in urban or rural settings, one day a week. The Educational Collaborative of Greater Boston has a program of week-long internships that

bring students of different backgrounds together to work with professionals in such fields as the media, politics, the arts, and world affairs to learn about those activities (and about each other). There are school-sponsored projects that take boys and girls out of the classroom to work in gardens, help with building restorations, and take part in archaeological excavations. The important elements are having students work together in positions of real responsibility where they know others are counting on them, and undoing some of the social, age, and intellectual isolation that school typically fosters. Such programs have additional benefits. They give students important growth experiences and build self-confidence; they involve the community more closely and positively with the school; they help young people make career choices; and they provide role-models other than parents and teachers. By giving students a sense of purpose, we can give them also a sense of dignity and an incentive for learning.

Reflection and Outlook

Compulsion is a dominant factor in student lives. Many students see school as a *must do*, yet are not convinced that what we teach is what they need or want to know. For a significant number, school is something to get through with the least effort and the best grades for college. We teachers fight a serious battle of motivation, for many of our pupils do not see the point of what we require. Though much seems pointless to them, students know that they must make their way through the maze, yet are always aware that they are playing by somebody else's rules.

The very fact of having to cover a certain amount of material in a certain amount of time may be precisely what ends up pounding curiosity, spontaneity, and desire to learn out of students' heads. We end up substituting threats of punishment and fear of grades for genuine motivation to learn. For many, there is little time or energy left over after

doing what they *have* to do for pursuing what they *want* to learn. For others, school seems remote from their futures, and they "opt out" as completely as they can.

Teachers, parents, and students often give more of their attention to teaching than they do to student learning. Often, most of the effort seems to be the teacher's rather than the student's. The more active students are, whether in class or working independently at home, the better they learn and retain information. We need to emphasize that learning requires hard work and discipline on the part of the student; teachers cannot "pour knowledge" into students' heads. Although being a teacher requires far more energy than being a student, it is extremely difficult to force oneself to work and to sit through classes one is not committed to. It is also extremely difficult to teach students who do not want to learn. Both roles are so taxing that each group has only moderate sympathy for the other.

Despite our disclaimers, many students feel powerless to change the situation they're in. They do not feel they have any responsibility or control in shaping their own education. What results is a slave mentality of committing small sabotages to subvert the system; the passivity, lack of power, and dependency that school engenders leads to "acting out," vandalism, and manipulation as ways of "getting back." Sometimes students feel they aren't respected, so they lie or cut class to avoid a situation, thereby creating the very lack of trust they feared in the first place. Sometimes their dependency leads them to believe that "teachers don't care" when we are not there and ready to serve them at all times.

Many feel it makes no difference whether they do their work or not, for no one is really counting on them to come through. Students gain a sense of dignity and self worth from feeling that they are needed by others and that they have contributed to work they feel is valuable. They gain a more accurate perception of themselves and others from interaction with those who are *not* teachers, parents, or fellow students: those of all ages from a variety of ethnic, socio-economic, and geographic backgrounds. Schools *could* be providing both effec-

tive training in basic skills *and* opportunities for personal and social growth through a restructuring of the school day, week, or year. Time and energy that could be put to far better use are wasted.

School is often an isolated, closed environment for both students and teachers. The social controversy around education has had a more demoralizing effect on both groups than is commonly realized and the problem of teacher burn-out is real. Being a student means dealing with much anxiety over measuring up to standards of teachers, parents, and peers, over an uncertain future, over breaking away from home, over defining an identity, and over establishing relationships with friends and members of the opposite sex. It is often difficult to have energy left over for schoolwork. Particularly as an advanced student I often had a feeling of slowly sinking: work was piling up, and I was always under pressure.

Both teachers and students are spread so thin that we do little really well, and often end up doing only what we must. I am increasingly aware of how much teacher time and energy are spent in activities that have nothing to do with teaching. I don't think that we can do everything well, and the community must be aware that the time has come to establish priorities. If they ask certain things of us, we cannot do others. Although many teachers do an excellent job, there are others who need help. We need to look at ways to increase information-sharing, observation, and support for teachers, for the present means are inadequate.

Lincoln and Sudbury appreciated the publicity my enrollment as a student brought. *Time* magazine, *The Boston Globe*, and other newspapers made it a good story. I appeared on "The Today Show" and on several other TV and radio programs. And the publicity was good. At a time when the school was under heavy criticism from the community, my project tended to temper some of the harshest criticism and give people in-

teresting alternatives to think about. They took pride in the fact that their high school had done something positive and new.

But what had changed? This teacher had changed, for one thing. Not radically, perhaps, but nonetheless importantly. When I returned to my classroom for the spring semester, my expectations were clearer—better defined and, I should like to think, more sensible. And at the same time that I had become a more demanding teacher, I had become a more empathetic teacher.

Had Lincoln-Sudbury Regional High School changed? Yes and no. My reports were widely read and well received. Many teachers who had been cynical about my project changed their minds and acknowledged that I had put my finger on problems they had sensed but never confronted. Others tried to follow some of my more concrete suggestions for change, and those that worked well they integrated into their regular teaching practice. Teachers whose student I had been continued to use some of the new techniques we had tried; still others told me their classes had taken on a new tone, a seriousness of purpose that had been missing before. In conjunction with other projects funded by the school, teachers were encouraged to observe each others' classes, and many did. One German teacher came to a psychology class of mine for most of the second semester!

Pleased with my project and with the positive reaction it elicited in the school and the community, the administration gave me additional support to follow up during the rest of the year. I held workshops and continued to observe and work with individual teachers to help them improve their classes. The administration intends to continue to allocate curriculum development funds for projects aimed at improving instruction.

Students felt that for once, they were listened to and taken seriously. Many of them read my reports and, by a wide margin, they agreed with most of my observations. Some felt they had gained greater insight into their own and others' behavior in school. I became a kind of student ombudsman,

trying to address problems they felt and to make better communication between them and their teachers.

But the school did not change dramatically. The change that followed immediately was probably more a result of pressure in the community to "tighten up" than a result of anything I proposed or observed. While the school is concerned about improving teacher and student performance, it is also faced with sharply declining enrollments, unwillingness to meet inflationary costs, and myriad other issues common to schools today. My project was carried on in the shadow of other concerns, and the school could respond only with limited energy.

The fact of the matter is that change must occur first in the minds of individual teachers, students, and parents. Student attitudes are difficult for schools to shape because young people are also influenced by family, the media, and other social forces.

As for teacher improvement, that is a long, difficult process and not something that will come about in short order. Teaching is very much a reflection of personality and philosophy. Although teachers *can* improve through observation and discussion, they have to *want* to improve and they must be secure enough to try new methods. Given the lack of support, the pressure, and the low morale many now feel, their incentive for innovation and improvement tends to be limited. Moreover, improvement takes time and energy. Given their workloads, few can find the time, for example, to go to other teachers' classes. Unless the school can institutionalize time for them to do this kind of thing, improvement is unlikely to occur.

What are the implications of my experience for other schools? From the hundreds of letters I have received from all over the world, I know that many of the problems I describe are common. I have taken only one step by identifying some of the issues. Other schools might profitably replicate my experience or invite teachers to make proposals for other plans to improve instruction. Once problems are identified, the next

step is to begin finding solutions that can be institutionalized. It is my hope that other school administrators are committed enough to the need to improve, and perceptive enough to know that already-tried, easy solutions are inadequate, to spend the time, energy, and financial resources that will make school a place where Johnny and Jane can learn to read, write, calculate—*and* become responsible, whole human beings.

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